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SOLDIERS' TRACT ASSOCIATION,
Richmond, Va.

No. 74.

The Two Steps to Immediate Conversion.

ADDRESSED TO THE MOURNER IN ZION.

My Dear Friend: I take it for granted that you are at last awake to a sense of your sin and danger—that you have given up all your frivolous excuses, and weak and wicked apologies for your past sinful and rebellious life—that you do confess with shame and contrition your guilt in the sight of God; and, lastly, that you are most earnestly inquiring, "What must I do to be saved?"

You are in pursuit of an object, and solicitous to know the mode of its attainment. A clear perception of the nature of that object will probably throw light upon the best means of securing it. Let us then first seek instruction on this point. You need *salvation*, or, as you express it, "to be saved." What is salvation? Leaving out the application of the term to your future maturity in grace and glorification in Heaven, we will confine ourselves to the more restricted sense in which you use it, as applicable to your present urgent necessities.

Your desire may be expressed thus—to be delivered from the present burden of guilt and apprehension of deserved wrath, and to receive the moral power to "go and sin no more;" in other words, you want the *pardon* of your sins, and the *regeneration* of your nature.

Let us inquire what these two words, pardon and regeneration, mean.

1. Pardon, in its common acceptation, is the passing by an offence, the forgiveness of a debt, the remission of a penalty. Pardon, when spoken of in Scripture as exercised by God toward the sinner, includes the free and full forgiveness of all his past transgressions, the entire remission of the penalty due to his crimes, and, in immediate and inseparable connection with these, the justification of the person of the sinner; that is, such a change of his

moral relation to God as will constitute him innocent in his sight, as though he had always been free from any wilful or actual violation of the moral law.

2. Regeneration is that change wrought in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, through our belief of the truth, which constitutes us children of God, and gives us a title to Heaven—which thoroughly renews our spiritual natures, reversing the natural bent of our affections and will, and strongly inclining us to hate and renounce all sin, and to love and choose God, and all that is holy and good.

Is this the salvation, dear reader, that you desire? Do you truly wish for deliverance from *sin itself*, as well as from its consequences? If so, your earnest inquiry is, Can *I* obtain this salvation—obtain it *now*—and in *what way?* I answer emphatically, YES—now, this day, this very hour, by taking a very plain and simple course.

According to the teachings of God's word, there are but TWO STEPS necessary to salvation, and they are REPENTANCE and FAITH. Let us then, if we may, acquire clear views of what is comprised in these terms.

REPENTANCE, when reduced to its results, that is, separate and apart from the bitterness, the tears, the self-reproach, the humiliations and the confessions which usually accompany it, is neither more nor less than obedience to the precept, "Cease to do evil: learn to do well." But it is this obedience in its broadest sense. It is, "Cease to do evil," promptly, universally, for ever. It is, "Learn to do well," at once and always, with both hands, earnestly. But you reply, "This is a slow process, and my case is an urgent one. What you assert to be necessary I have begun to do. How long must I pursue this course ere I can look upon myself as a true penitent?" Have you indeed? Have you honestly determined in your heart, and solemnly covenanted with your Maker, that you have done for ever with your sins; and are you now daily striving by his help to live unto God? If so, I have good news for you—you are *now* a true penitent, and, as such, you have this moment a *right*, by God's own invitation, to take the second step, even to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for *present* pardon. Here are both the invi-

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tation and the warrant for your confidence: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isaiah lv. 7. When? According to the tenor of the text, as well as of all Scripture, *now!*

Do you still ask, "How can I *know* that I have at heart forsaken my sins?" I answer, this is a matter of consciousness. Were I to ask you if you love your dearest and best friend, or if you abhor the vilest and most detestable crimes, you would not have to enter upon a course of reasoning to satisfy yourself that you love the one and hate the other. Even so, your own consciousness must apprise you at once of the fact, if it be so, of your having truly turned from your sins. How can you conceive that a man could, calmly, solemnly, and with all sincerity in the sight of God, renounce all known sin, and fix the firm resolve to lead a new life in the fear of God, without *knowing* that he had done so? This is *consciousness* of the fact, and when you have arrived at this point, you have taken the first Scripture step toward conversion.

This is a very important point, however, and one on which you should be properly guarded. God requires "truth in the inward parts." It must be no half-way business. *All sin* how great or small soever in your eyes, how dear or desirable soever it may seem, yea, though it be the very warp of the web of life, and though the effort to disengage it make the heartstrings quiver with anguish, *all*, ALL must be sacrificed: in purpose of heart, deliberately and for ever laid aside.

And now as to the time requisite to come to this point. Must it necessarily be long? By no means. Would not a single hour's serious thought be abundantly sufficient to make up your mind fully upon this subject, and to begin the great work? Undoubtedly. I once heard of a man who, though he entered the church unconcerned, deliberately resolved, during the sermon, that he would give up the world and be a Christian. At the close of the discourse he arose, addressed a few words to his old friends, stating his determination, and then approached

the altar to ask the prayers of God's people, but before he could kneel there, was powerfully converted.

Now, my dear friend, let me assure you that, if I rightly understand the teachings of the Bible upon this subject, when you have arrived at the state of mind I have described, whether it took you five minutes or five years to get there, you are a true penitent, and a fit subject for immediate conversion. You are just where God would have you be in order to convert you. You have complied with the terms laid down in the text quoted: (Isa. lv. 7:) you *have* "forsaken your way" and your "evil thoughts," and are now, in the best way you know, striving to "return unto the Lord." What then prevents the instant realization of the promise to "have mercy upon" you and "abundantly pardon" you? Nothing but your unbelief.

This brings us to the consideration of the second step, that of FAITH.

This is the great point of difficulty with almost all penitents. *What* shall I believe? and *how* shall I believe? are the questions asked again and again, by the anxious and burdened heart. May the Spirit of Truth aid in giving the answers.

First, then, God *requires* faith: "without faith it is impossible to please him." Heb. xi. 6. This fact must imply two things: first, that God has given us *sufficient ground* for our faith, and, second, that he has given us the *power* to believe. Let us see the ground on which we are thus required to believe. It is written, John iii. 16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Again, 2 Cor. v. 19, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And again, Rom. iii. 23–26, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past; . . . that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

Do not these scriptures plainly teach us that the original source of man's redemption was the essential goodness and infinite benevolence of God the Father, prompting him to devise some means to rescue his fallen creatures from their perilous condition? In the first of these quotations it is said, "*God so loved* the world *that he gave* his Son." Evidently the love was in the heart of the Father previous to the gift of the Son, for that gift is represented as the consequence of this love. In the second, we see the perfect willingness of God that man should be restored to his favor, and no longer have trespasses imputed unto him. In the third, we not only have the same precious truth reiterated, but we have also set before us the specific means, the actual instrumentality, by which this reconciliation is to be accomplished: Christ the propitiation—through *faith in his blood*—and, finally, the result in the case of God and the sinner—God remains JUST while the sinner is *justified*.

To one of the expressions in the last passage I would call your undivided attention. It is this: "*through faith in his* BLOOD." These few words abound in the very essence of the gospel. Here are both the manner of, and the satisfactory reason for, your justification. You still ask, "In what way is the blood of Christ a satisfactory reason to God, for the sake of which, on my exercise of faith in it, he will blot out my sins?" I answer, on the simple ground of rendering an equivalent, or, in other words, of paying a debt. How is this? You have violated the law of God; consequently, it has a claim upon you; you are a *debtor* to that law. What is the amount of that debt? It involves the forfeit of eternal life—"The soul that sinneth, *it shall die.*" The law is strict, stern, unyielding *It* knows no mercy, *it* provides no remedy. It must be maintained in all its integrity, though the last sinner perish for ever. How is this debt to be paid?—this demand of an infinitely holy law to be satisfied? So far as you are concerned, there is but one way of meeting it, and that is by enduring eternally the horrors of the second death. There is no hope for you. You are already involved, and each day but adds to the deep shade of guilt that already darkens your ruined spirit.

Just at this juncture the compassion of God has interposed in your behalf. Seeing man's undone condition, the Lord Jesus Christ, the second person in the ever-blessed Trinity, undertook the work of saving him This he did, not by abrogating the law, not by suspending its operation and arbitrarily pardoning the sinner, but by taking man's place and suffering in his stead. The life of Jesus was paid to redeem our forfeited life. The *blood* of the Son of God was poured out as the expiatory sacrifice for the sin of the world. In submitting to the sufferings and death which he endured, he fully met and for ever satisfied all the claims which the law of God had against man. He in whom "dwelt all the fulness of the God-head bodily," who was the Author of this law, and consequently himself under no obligation to it, even he, in virtue of his own character as "God over all," in condescending to be man's substitute, stamped upon his sacrificial death such infinite value as to render it equivalent, if need be, to the redemption of a thousand worlds.

Here, then, you see the procuring cause of your salvation. Here is the foundation which God has laid for your faith.

This, then, is *what* you must believe: The Lord Jesus Christ has met the demands of the law upon *me*. He has stood in *my place* and suffered *for me*. He has paid *my debt*. He has died in *my stead;* consequently, *I* need not die. What more could you ask? What more can the law ask? Nothing, literally nothing. Every whit is paid, and you are free—free this moment, if you will now accept and rely upon this Jesus as your Saviour. God is now, on his part, *reconciled to you* through this work of Christ, and ready at once to receive you as his accepted child.

Let us now for a moment consider the *power* to believe, and the *act* of believing. It must be evident to a thinking mind that God cannot, consistently with his character, require any work at our hands without conferring on us the necessary ability to perform it. But he *requires* us to believe; consequently, he must have given us power to do so. The power to believe is one of the natural endowments of the mind. It is that faculty by which, on re-

ceiving proper evidence, we put confidence in, or receive as true, any proposition that may be presented to us. It is something in daily, almost continual, exercise. There is scarcely any ordinary transaction of life in which it is not called into play. Its exercise is the ground-work of all social relations, of all business engagements, and without it man would become separated from his fellow, and society be uprooted.

Now, my friend, it is the same attribute which you are daily exercising with reference to temporal matters, that you are required to bring to bear upon the subject of salvation. God has provided the object of faith—the Lord Jesus Christ and his atonement—and he has graciously conferred on you the power to believe. What now remains to be done? Simply to bring the two together—the power to believe to act upon the object of belief. This may be properly called *the act of faith.*

This leads us to answer the last question—"*How* shall believe?"

The Scripture answer to this question is this: "With the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness," or justification. To believe with the *heart* is to take hold of Christ with the *affections;* in other words, to confide in him with the trust of love, of approval, of satisfaction. Not only must your mind receive the truth that the atonement of Christ is the meritorious cause that procures your salvation, but, with an humbling sense of your own utter unworthiness, and of the infinite goodness and condecension of God in providing this ransom for you, you must approach the throne of grace, gladly and thankfully receiving the proffered boon of pardon as offered by God in all sincerity, heartily relying on the Lord Jesus Christ as your *own, present, all-sufficient* Redeemer.

Do you fear to make the venture? Has not God invited, encouraged, *commanded* you? Hear him: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "He that believeth shall be saved." "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." You say that you do try to believe, but you do not feel. It is because your faith is defective

You ask something besides God's word on which to rest your confidence. Is this wise? Is it not dishonoring to God? How can he bless a soul with a sense of his approval, while that soul refuses to credit his word, and asks for other proof? If a friend of long-tried integrity were to relate to you a circumstance that had just passed under his own observation, would he not consider it an insult for you to remark, "I do not *feel* what you say to be the truth?" Again, *feeling* that you are pardoned, or a consciousness of forgiveness, cannot take place until after the fact itself has transpired. The effect cannot exist before the cause. You are not called upon to believe that you are *already* converted; neither may you delay at the mere belief that you *will be*.

Perhaps the usual steps by which the seeking soul more immediately enters into the actual realization of the blessing, are these:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ has by his atonement perfectly satisfied the justice of God in *my behalf*.

2. God, on account of this atonement, offers me a *full* and *present* pardon.

3. He is *able*, *willing*, and *ready* to grant me this pardon *now*.

4. Believing that his word *cannot fail*, I now venture my all upon it, and, receiving Christ as my only and all-sufficient Saviour, *I am now saved through him*.

Not that these points always, nor even frequently, occupy the mind as a formal process, but probably, in one way or another, the truths they contain operate upon the soul in the successful effort to believe.

And now, my penitent friend, having presented what I believe to be the Bible plan of justification by faith, (repentance being only the pre-requisite of faith,) let me earnestly urge you to an immediate experimental test of its efficacy. Why delay a moment? If faith be the instrumentality, is it not at hand? If Christ be the object, is he not "nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart?" Does not all Scripture say, "*Now* is the accepted time?" Come to Jesus just *now*, and just *as you are*.

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